

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-07 EB-11 CIAE-00 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 TRSE-00 MC-02 AID-20 DRC-01 /153 W

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R 022115Z JUL 74

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0516

SECDEF

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

USNMR BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY OSLO

USMISSION NATO

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 16193

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, LEXP, NATO, FR

SUBJECT: F-104 REPLACEMENT AND EUROGROUP

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: UNDER HEADLINE "THE BELGIAN PRIME MINISTER TAKES AN INTEREST IN MIRAGES AND HOPES THAT FRANCE WILL ENTER THE EUROGROUP", LE MONDES JULY 2 EDITION CARRIES ARTICLE FROM BRUSSELS BY PHILLIPPE LEMAITRE SPECULATING THAT BELGIANS MAY SEE A WAY OF ATTRACTING THE FRENCH INTO THE EUROGROUP (OR A SIMILAR ORGANIZATION) IN EXCHANGE FOR EUROPEANS -- INCLUDING THE BELGIANS -- PURCHASING FRENCH MIRAGE AIRCRAFT AS SUCCESSOR TO F-104. END SUMMARY

2. INFORMAL EMBASSY TRANSLATION OF KEY PORTIONS OF ARTICLE RELATING TO F-104 REPLACEMENT SUBJECT FOLLOWS:
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"TINDEMANS HAS AN EXCELLENT TRUMP TO USE AS BAIT (ON THE

QUESTION OF FRENCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE EUROGROUP) AND CAN BE SURE TO BE LISTENED TO ATTENTIVELY. BEFORE SUMMER BELGIUM MUST DECIDE HOW IT WILL REPLACE ITS F-104'S. THE FRENCH INDUSTRY, WHICH HAS PROPOSED THE MIRAGE F-1 EQUIPPED WITH THE M-53 MOTOR, IS ENGAGED IN A TIGHT COMPETITION WITH THE AMERICANS WHO OFFER TWO AIRCRAFT, THE NORTHROPE COBRA AND YF-16 OF GENERAL DYNAMICS, AND WITH THE SWEDES WHO ARE TRYING TO SELL THEIR VIGGEN, RE-NAMED . . . EUROFIGHTER. THE STAKE IS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT BECAUSE THE NETHERLANDS, DENMARK AND NORWAY, WHO MUST ALSO FIND A SUCCESSOR TO THE F-104'S IN THEIR AIR FORCES, HAVE CREATED WITH BELGIUM A COORDINATING GROUP IN AN EFFORT TO ARRIVE AT A COMMON DECISION ON ONE AIRCRAFT ... THE ELEMENTS THAT WILL BE CONSIDERED BY THE BELGIANS AND THEIR FRIENDS BEFORE ARRIVING AT THEIR DECISION ARE VERY DIVERSE: THE TECHNICAL VALUE OF THE AIRCRAFT, THEIR PRICE AND THE INDUSTRIAL COMBINATION PROPOSED BY THE CONSTRUCTOR WILL UNDOUBTEDLY PLAY A DETERMINING ROLE BUT POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE EQUALLY LIKELY TO INFLUENCE THE CHOICE. THE UNITED STATES IS PLEADING THE INTEREST OF ITS INDUSTRY IN THE NAME OF 'BURDENSARING' AMONG THE COUNTRIES OF THE ALLIANCE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT MAY BE SENSITIVE TO THE IDEA OF USING THIS MASSIVE MILITARY ORDER TO GIVE A NEW OPPORTUNITY TO THE EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY, WHICH COULD PROFIT FROM THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTEGRATE ITSELF. MIGHT NOT THIS ARGUMENT -- WHICH WITHOUT DOUBT IS NOT SUFFICIENT TODAY TO OVERCOME FRENCH RETICENCE -- TAKE ON INCREASED IMPORTANCE IF FRANCE MAKES UP ITS MIND NO LONGER TO STAND ALOOF FROM THE EFFORTS UNDERTAKEN BY ITS ALLIES IN THE EUROGROUP TO STANDARDIZE AND MODERNIZE THEIR ARMAMENTS? THERE IS EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THIS IS THE REASONING OF TINDEMANS . . ."

3. COMMENT: ACCORDING TO THE LOCAL PRESS, WHEN ASKED

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 16193

WHETHER HE HAD DISCUSSED FRENCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE EURO-GROUP DURING HIS JULY 1 MEETING WITH FRENCH PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC, BELGIAN PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS REPLIED THAT THEY HAD DISCUSSED IN GENERAL TERMS THE PROBLEMS OF EUROPE'S DEFENSE. LATER, TINDEMANS WAS ASKED WHETHER HE HAD DISCUSSED WITH THE FRENCH THE SALE OF AIRCRAFT. HE REPLIED, "OUR DISCUSSION TOOK PLACE ON ANOTHER LEVEL. OUR APPROACH WAS DIFFERENT (TOUT AUTRE)." ON JULY 2 BELGIAN DCM TOLD POLITICAL COUNSELOR, HOWEVER, THAT BELGIANS HAD RAISED THE EUROGROUP ISSUE WITH THE FRENCH, AND WERE TOLD THAT IT IS OUT OF THE QUESTION BECAUSE OF INTERNAL POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS. THE FRENCH POINTED TO THE CRITICISM GENERATED BY THE OTTAWA DECLARATION, AND SAID THE ACT OF JOINING THE EUROGROUP WOULD BE FAR WORSE IN VIEW OF ITS UNAMBIGUOUS LINK TO THE MILITARY SIDE OF
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THE ALLIANCE. IN SEPARATE CONVERSATION JULY 2, FRENCH OFFICIAL CLOSE TO CHIRAC TOLD US THAT FRANCE HAS NO INTENTION OF JOINING EUROGROUP IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE. POINTING TO EUROGROUP MEETINGS AT DEFENSE MINISTER LEVEL ON FRINGES OF NATO DPC MINISTERIALS, AND TO EUROGROUP ROLE IN NATO'S BURDENSARING EFFORT, THE OFFICIAL SAID THAT FRENCH MEMBERSHIP IN EUROGROUP WOULD BE SEEN BY CERTAIN KEY SUPPORTERS OF GISCARD AS RADICAL AND UNACCEPTABLE CHANGE IN FRENCH POLICY TOWARD NATO.
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